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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7609  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4634  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1862  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1515  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3619  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1401  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2229  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000063

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, DRL, DRL/IRF, DRL/AWH, INR C.ZENZIE  
NSC FOR E.PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: ISLAMIC LEADER ON FATWAS AND "PROTECTING ISLAM"

REF: A. JAKARTA 0004

[B](#). 07 JAKARTA 3442

[C](#). 07 JAKARTA 3464

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Classified By: A/POL/C Daniel Turnbull for 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The DCM met with Ma'ruf Amin, Chairman of the Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) Fatwa Commission, on January 9. Ma'ruf provided an overview of how the MUI takes questions from the public and issues fatwas (religious edicts). He defended MUI's condemnation of the Ahmadiyah sect by invoking the MUI's mission to protect core Islamic beliefs from outside influence, but stressed that MUI was committed to peace and interfaith harmony. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) ASK AND YE SHALL RECEIVE: In response to the DCM's question about MUI's target audience, Ma'ruf said that most MUI fatwas were issued at the request of the government, local communities, or industry. Ma'ruf depicted these edicts as helping the government to build a religious foundation for law and to consider the broader social impact of its policies. The government, for example, had turned to MUI for guidance in the process of making national policy on abortion and gambling. Ma'ruf also highlighted the MUI's role in helping the government to set regulations for sharia-compliant banking, a small but growing sector of activity, and in certifying food products as halal (permissible for consumption under Islamic guidelines).

[1](#)3. (C) FATWAS FROM MULTIPLE LEVELS: Ma'ruf said all MUI fatwas were based on the Quran and the Sunnah (religious practices instituted by Muhammad). There were three sources of MUI fatwas. First, the MUI Fatwa Commission met regularly under Ma'ruf's leadership to address questions that had been posed to MUI. It issued most of the organization's edicts. Second, the MUI gathered Islamic jurists every year for a general assembly which featured in-depth discussions. This assembly had been particularly concerned with answering theological problems posed by religious liberalism. Finally, the MUI convened a national congress every five years which set broad guidelines for its fatwa responsibilities. Both of these larger bodies could generate fatwas.

14. (C) PROTECTING ISLAM: In a discussion of how MUI wrote its fatwas and whether it reconciled them with the Indonesian constitution, Ma'ruf stated that the MUI's fundamental goal was to protect the Indonesian Muslim community and to preserve authentic Islamic teachings. Ma'ruf described the Indonesian constitution as "elastic," meaning that it allowed multiple faiths to co-exist peacefully, and asserted that the constitution guaranteed freedom of religion but also the rights of Muslims to guard their faith against outside influences.

15. (C) AHMADIYAH AS OUTSIDERS: Ma'ruf maintained that MUI fatwas against Ahmadiyah--a small sect which is considered heretical by many Muslims and which has come under attack recently by local militants (reftels)--were part of the MUI's defense of Islamic beliefs. MUI's problem with Ahmadiyah was its claim to be a Muslim group. MUI would not question Ahmadiyah's freedom to operate if it did so as a separate religion. In terms of the MUI's outreach to the Ahmadiyah community, Ma'ruf said that MUI leaders had met with Ahmadiyah representatives before issuing the 2005 fatwa against the group. The Ahmadiyah community had not accepted the MUI's recommendation that the sect return to mainstream Islamic beliefs, recast themselves as a religion distinct from Islam, or dissolve their organization altogether.

16. (C) BIO NOTES: Ma'ruf, age 64, was educated primarily in schools affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, in East Java, and completed his studies as an expert in Islamic law. He was first elected as a member of the NU's national leadership board in 1989 and continues to be an influential member of the organization. He joined former President Abdurrahman Wahid's National Awakening Party but in 2007 took a position on the advisory board of its offshoot, the National Clerics' Awakening Party (PKNU). Ma'ruf does not speak English.

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